



**THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
MIDDLESEX DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
40 THORNDIKE STREET CAMBRIDGE MA 02141**

MARTHA COAKLEY  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Tel: 617-679-6500  
Fax: 617-225-0871

**Contact: Emily LaGrassa/Melissa Sherman  
(617) 679-6522**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 20, 2006**

**THREE INDIVIDUALS INDICTED IN CONNECTION WITH FIRE AT TROPICAL  
FISH AND REPTILE STORE IN CAMBRIDGE**

**CAMBRIDGE** – Yesterday, a Middlesex Grand Jury returned indictments against three individuals in connection with the September fire at the Boston Tropical Fish and Reptile store in Cambridge. Thanh Trinh, age 42, of Charlestown, Zachary Azzam, age 18, of Cambridge, and Dennis Nickerson, age 21, of Somerville, are all charged with willful burning of a building, cruelty to animals, larceny over \$250, larceny from a building, and conspiracy.

According to authorities, on Wednesday, September 27, 2006, at approximately 9:50 p.m., Cambridge Police and Cambridge Fire Departments responded to the Boston Tropical Fish and Reptile store located at 243 Monsignor O'Brien Highway in Cambridge for a report of a fire. Upon arrival at the scene authorities discovered the building on fire, and graffiti on the exterior of the building. An employee from a separate business located on the second floor of that building escaped unharmed. The Animal Rescue League, and Cambridge Animal Control, also responded to the scene to assist in the search and rescue of animals. A number of animals did perish in the fire, while others were successfully rescued.

After a multi-agency investigation, involving the Cambridge Police and Fire Departments, Somerville Fire Department, State Police Fire and Explosion Investigations Unit, State Fire Marshals Office, The Joint Terrorism Task Force, Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives (ATF), and the Middlesex District Attorney's Office, investigators determined that the fire was intentionally set. As a result of the investigation, investigators sought and obtained arrest warrants for Trinh, Azzam, and Nickerson, and all three individuals were arrested without incident on the afternoon of October 6, 2006.

At this time authorities allege that Trinh, a manager at the store, who was in the process of buying the business, intentionally set the fire with the assistance of Azzam and Nickerson. Authorities allege that Trinh intentionally vandalized the building to make it look like an act committed by an animal activist group. As a result, investigators from The Joint Terrorist Task Force also assisted in the investigation.

**-MORE-**

On Friday, October 6, 2006, all three individuals were arraigned in Cambridge District Court before Judge Jonathan Brant. At arraignment Trinh pled not guilty and was ordered held without bail, and committed to Bridgewater State Hospital. Nickerson and Azzam also pled not guilty at arraignment, and were both ordered held on \$1,000 bail. Judge Brant also ordered the following conditions of release for both Nickerson and Azzam should they post bail: report to probation once a week, have no contact with co-defendant's, stay away from the building and property at 241-245 Monsignor O'Brien Highway, refrain from alcohol, drugs and firearms, refrain from use of fire producing materials, and refrain from abuse of animals.

The Grand Jury returned the indictments against Trinh, Azzam, and Nickerson yesterday afternoon. Superior Court arraignment dates has not yet been scheduled. The prosecutor assigned to this case is Assistant District Attorney Michael Friedland.

###